TL 2821

EAST TIMOR INDEPENDENCE COMMITTEE
P.O. Box 68 419
TAMAKI MAKAURAU
AUCKLAND
Tel/Fax 09 377 5541

25 May, 1996.

MEDIA RELEASE: East Timorese Asylum seekers should be welcomed to New Zealand:

The East Timor Independence Committee urges that the five young East Timorese who entered our Jakarta Embassy in January be welcomed to New Zealand as migrants on humanitarian grounds, since this is their explicit request - (New Zealand Herald pg 15, 25 May, 1996). The New Zealand Government is guilty of breaching the spirit and the letter of its UN Convention commitments to refugees by inititally rejecting the men's request. We should accept them now and offer them the same support that is available to others who flee from persecution in fear of their lives. This would go some way to make amends for their earlier treatment.

"The Minister of Foreign Affairs should not hide behind the letter of our Immigration laws and insist on 'immediate family' in New Zealand," said Maire Leadbeater speaking for the East Timor Independence Committee. "These young men have 'family' waiting to help them settle and waiting to provide for their accommodation - that is our Committee and the church and human rights activists who have already offered to help with sponsoring the five. We have reminded the Minister in a letter of this offer."

"The Government did not stick to the letter of its international legal obligations to asylum seekers back in January when it patently failed to give 'due consideration' to the men's request to come here as refugees. Remember that the group took major risks to seek our protection. Their choice of New Zealand was not incidental but carefully thought out and detailed in a letter which one of them carried hidden on his person."

"Instead of a sanctuary from imminent harm - even inside our Embassy compound the young men faced a beating from an Indonesian soldier who entered in pursuit of the group. The soldier knew the group was on its way because of a tip-off passed on from our Embassy staff. No wonder the group at the time believed they had no alternative other than to accept the alternative of going to Portugal."

"The East Timor Independence Committee is still waiting for a reply from the Foreign Minister to a letter asking for an assurance that in future the Indonesian military would not be alerted if our Embassy receives advice of a possible asylum bid."

"In recent weeks in East Timor there have been renewed demonstrations in response to two killings by the military - one of a man who was attempting to take down an Indonesian flag. New Zealand cannot go on ignoring the victims of repression."

for further information: Maire Leadbeater: 09-849-3890